

23 SEP 1972



Clayton Fritchey

N. Viet 'Blood Bath' Really a Myth

SUCH IS THE POWER of the presidential pulpit, with television access to all the homes in the country, that millions of Americans have come to believe that U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam would result in the Communists perpetrating a purge and blood bath of stupendous proportions.

This is based on President Nixon's scare story of what happened in North Vietnam after the Communists defeated the French and took over in 1954.

In meeting the peace challenge of Sen. George McGovern, who has pledged to bring home all U.S. forces at once, Mr. Nixon has not hesitated to give the horror story another rerun, but, in the light of a new development which shows the alleged blood bath to be a myth, it will be interesting to see whether the President now drops the story.

MR. NIXON TELLS the tale a little differently each time, but they are all variations of a statement he made on April 16, 1971: "I think of a half-million, by conservative estimates, in North Vietnam who were murdered or otherwise exterminated by the North Vietnamese after they took

over from the French..." At the same press conference, he added that, "If the United States were to fail in Vietnam, if the Communists were to take over, the blood bath that would follow would be a blot on this nation's history..."

A Vietnam scholar, Garth Porter of Cornell University, has now tracked down the "authority" for the President's statements. The National Security Council has admitted to him that a prime source for the President's statement was a 1964 book by a North Vietnamese exile, Hoang Van Chi, which was financed and promoted by such U.S. agencies as the CIA.

Porter accuses Chi of "gross misquotations" and "fraudulent documentation." Yet, Porter says, "it is mainly on the basis of Mr. Chi's totally unreliable account, the intention of which was plainly not historical accuracy, but propaganda against North Vietnam, that the President himself has told the American people that 'half-a-million' people were exterminated."

CONFRONTED BY Porter's charges, Mr. Chi, now employed at the State Department's Washington

training center, says of his 500,000-blood-bath number, "It was just a guess, an estimate that nobody could figure."

Porter has rendered an important service in debunking what he calls the blood bath "myth," but it is only fair to say that other Asian experts, and even some U.S. public officials, such as Clark Clifford, the Secretary of Defense under Lyndon Johnson, have consistently questioned Mr. Nixon's version of the alleged purge.

Their doubts are strongly supported by the records of the International Control Commission, which disclosed that, in the two years following the 1954 Communist victory, only 19 complaints were filed covering political reprisals in all of North Vietnam. Later, in 1956, a peasant revolt was repressed and it is estimated that 10,000 to 15,000 may have died, but nobody really knows.

MR. NIXON intimates that the burden of a massacre in South Vietnam would fall on Catholics. If we are to believe the President, however, that is not what happened in North Vietnam. He referred to "a million-and-a-half Catholic refugees who fled to South Vietnam

when the Communists took over in 1954." In short, instead of being executed, they were, in keeping with the Geneva Agreements, allowed to leave if they so desired.

Clark Clifford also notes that a study by the South Vietnam Department of Education reveals that the number of Catholics who fled to the south is not 1.5 million, as claimed by Mr. Nixon, but 754,710. This is significant, Clifford says, "because the President overlooked the fact that there are still living in North Vietnam today approximately 800,000 Catholics."

In the final analysis, the blood bath scare rests on the supposition that Hanoi's forces would quickly triumph if the United States pulled out of the war. How so? The Saigon government has well over 1 million men under arms, trained and profusely equipped by the United States and backed by a public that is reputed to be overwhelmingly anti-Communist. It is hard to understand then how Hanoi, with only a few depleted divisions in South Vietnam, could quickly take over and stage a vast purge if the South Vietnamese army is all it's cracked up to be.

© 1972, Los Angeles Times